# Open Data for Government Accountability, Efficiency, and Effectiveness

## Government Executive Media Group

Thursday, November 13, 2014

**Gene L. Dodaro**
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office

# Agenda

Source: PhotoDisc.

- About GAO
- The case for data standards
- Persistent USAspending.gov data challenges
- Effective Implementation of the DATA Act
- Data analytics at GAO

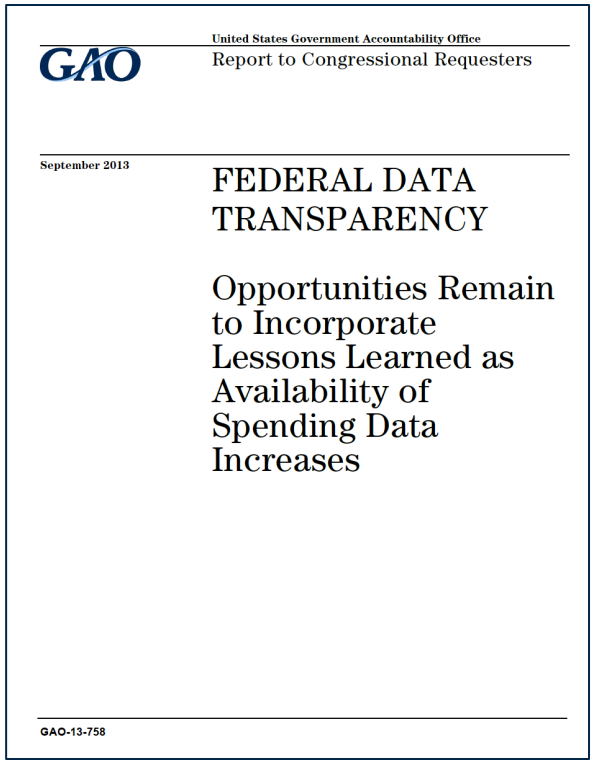
# U.S. Government Accountability Office

- Independent, nonpartisan congressional watchdog
- Advise Congress and executive agencies to help improve government performance and ensure accountability
- Work comes from Congressional mandates and requests and the Comptroller General's authority

# GAO goals and objectives to support the Congress and the Nation

| Goals | Objectives | |
|---|---|---|
| **Provide Timely, Quality Service to the Congress and the Federal Government to…**<br>Address Current and Emerging Challenges to the Well-being and Financial Security of the American People related to… | ■ Health care needs<br>■ Lifelong learning<br>■ Challenges facing an aging population<br>■ Effective system of justice<br>■ Housing finance and viable communities | ■ Stable financial system and consumer protection<br>■ Natural resources and the environment<br>■ National infrastructure<br>■ Benefits and protections for workers, families, and children |
| Respond to Changing Security Threats and the Challenges of Global Interdependence involving… | ■ Homeland security<br>■ Military capabilities and readiness | ■ Foreign policy and international economic interests |
| **Help Transform the Federal Government to Address National Challenges by assessing…** | ■ Government's fiscal position and approaches to address current and projected fiscal gaps<br>■ Federal government audit and internal control standards | ■ Major management challenges and program risks<br>■ Fraud, waste, and abuse, and improvements in internal controls |
| **Maximize the Value of GAO by Enabling Quality, Timely Service to the Congress and Being a Leading Practices Federal Agency by focusing on…** | ■ Efficiency, effectiveness, and quality<br>■ Diverse workforce and inclusive work environment | ■ Networks, collaborations and partnerships<br>■ Human, information, fiscal, technological, and physical resources |

# The Case for Data Standards


United States Government Accountability Office

Report to Congressional Requesters

September 2013

FEDERAL DATA TRANSPARENCY

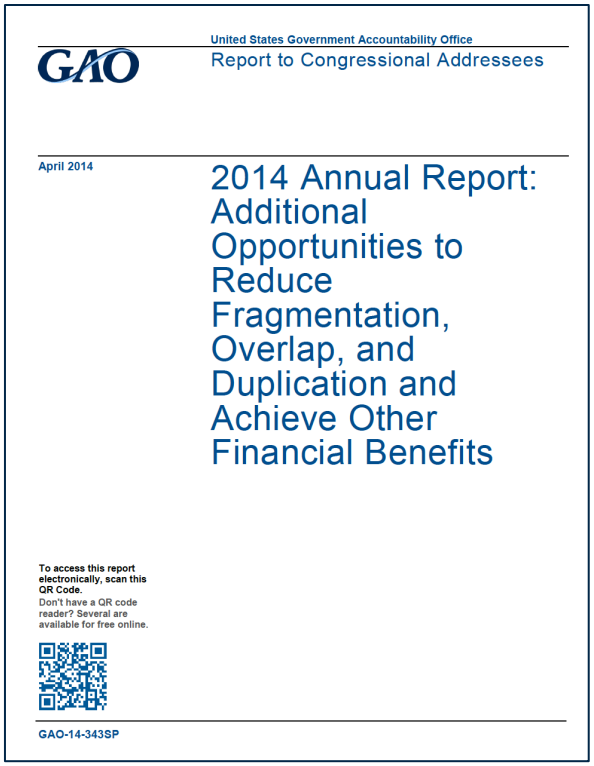
Opportunities Remain to Incorporate Lessons Learned as Availability of Spending Data Increases

GAO-13-758

Our earlier work on data transparency has found that the lack of consistent, reliable data:

- hampers the ability to link existing agency financial and award systems to monitor federal spending throughout the lifecycle
- limits data sharing across agencies, sectors of government and the law enforcement community to identify programs at risk for fraud, waste and abuse

# The Case For Data Standards (continued)



United States Government Accountability Office

Report to Congressional Addressees

April 2014

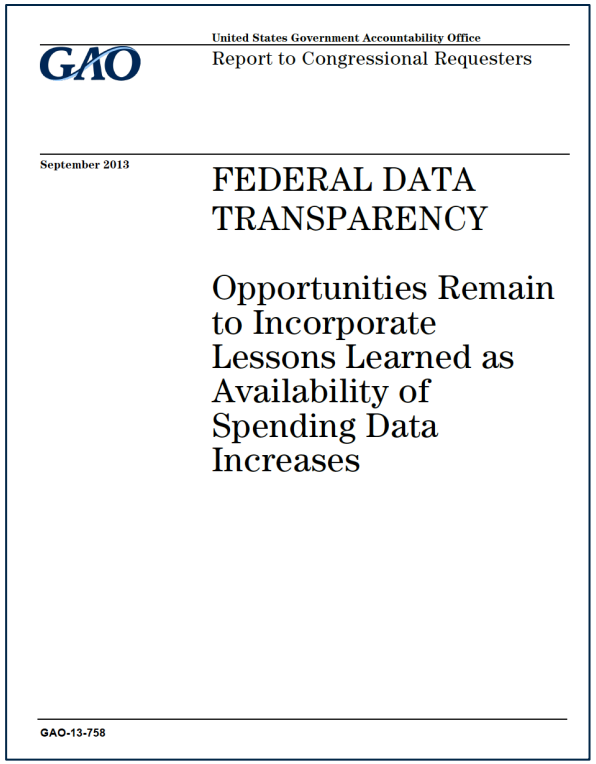
2014 Annual Report: Additional Opportunities to Reduce Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication and Achieve Other Financial Benefits

To access this report electronically, scan this QR Code.
Don't have a QR code reader? Several are available for free online.

GAO-14-343SP

- limits comparability among like programs to accurately measure the cost and magnitude of federal investments and identify program duplication, overlap and fragmentation
- prevents easy aggregation of data at the government-wide level to optimize existing data sources and reduce reporting burden

# The Case For Data Standards (continued)



United States Government Accountability Office

Report to Congressional Requesters

September 2013

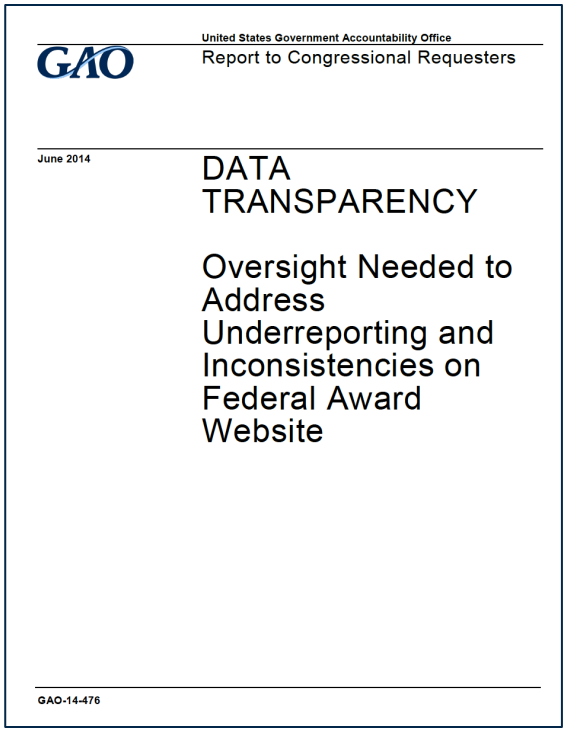
FEDERAL DATA TRANSPARENCY

Opportunities Remain to Incorporate Lessons Learned as Availability of Spending Data Increases

GAO-13-758

- The DATA Act responds to our recommendation to legislate transparency requirements, including data standards, and clear authority for implementation.
- We recommended that OMB, with the GAT Board, develop a long-term implementation plan and increase efforts to obtain stakeholder input.
- OMB generally agreed with our recommendations and has taken steps to increase stakeholder outreach.

# GAO's July 2014 report shows USAspending.gov data challenges highlight need for effective DATA Act implementation


United States Government Accountability Office
Report to Congressional Requesters

June 2014

DATA TRANSPARENCY

Oversight Needed to Address Underreporting and Inconsistencies on Federal Award Website

GAO-14-476

In our report evaluating the reliability of USASpending.gov data published in July (GAO-14-476), we found:

- Roughly 300 assistance programs representing $619B in FY12 awards were not reported to USASpending by January 2013
- Information on reported awards was largely inconsistent with agency records. Only an estimated 2 to 7 % of reported awards were fully consistent
- Information on the recipient's location, and the award's place of performance and description differed significantly from agency records
- Unclear guidance and weaknesses in oversight contributed to these issues

## GAO's July 2014 report (continued)

- We recommended that OMB clarify its guidance and develop and implement improved oversight processes.
- OMB generally agreed with our recommendations.
- These recommendations are consistent with actions to be taken to comply with the DATA Act.

GAO

# Effective implementation of the DATA Act can help in addressing these needs

The DATA Act of 2014 (DATA Act) requires:

- Treasury and OMB to develop government-wide financial data standards and issue related guidance
- Treasury to establish a data analysis center to provide data and analytical tools for preventing or reducing improper payments and improving federal spending data transparency
- OMB and Treasury to consult with public and private stakeholders in establishing data standards
- Agency IGs to report on agencies' spending data quality and the use of data standards
- GAO to review IG reports and assess agencies' data quality and implementation of the data standards.

# DATA Act reinforces related statutory requirements

GPRA Modernization Act of 2010 requires:

- OMB to publish an inventory of all federal programs identified by agencies on a central governmentwide website
- Agencies also provide program-level funding and performance information
- Transparency of results achieved through web-based reporting
- More-frequent analysis and monitoring of performance by senior leadership at the government-wide and agency levels to identify and prioritize key performance and management issues
- Disclosure on the reliability and accuracy of performance information

OMB will merge implementation of the program inventory provisions with DATA Act transparency requirements since both laws require web-based reporting

# DATA Act reinforces related statutory requirements

Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Improvement Act of 2012 (IPERIA)

- Latest in a series of laws addressing government-wide improper payments
- Requires that agencies verify benefit eligibility before making a payment to a person or entity by checking multiple existing databases
- Modified requirements to promote computer matching activities that assist in the detection and prevention of improper payments

GAO

# Data analytics at GAO

GAO is leveraging open data as part of its piloting of data analytic technologies.

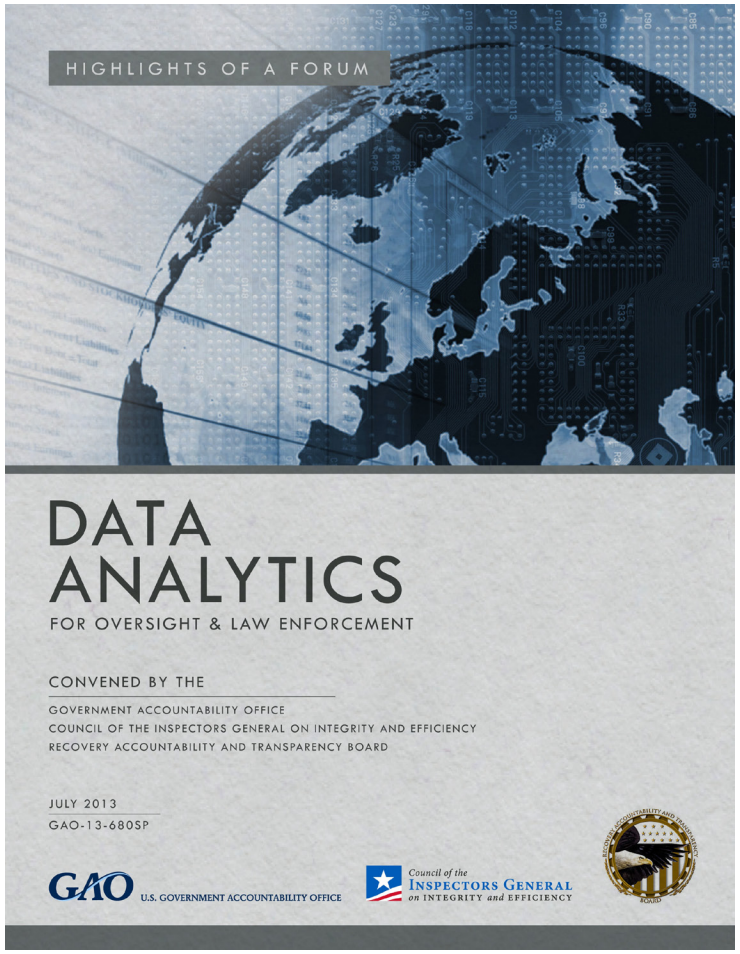
Pilot concepts include:

- Data mining for improper payments analysis
- Link analysis for fraud identification
- Document clustering and text mining for overlap and duplication analysis
- Network analysis for program coordination assessment

Preliminary indications include:

- A substantial decrease in labor and time inputs in analyzing documents and their content
- A possible increase in quality and number of findings
- Enhanced visualization for more efficient communication of key findings

# Data Analytics at GAO: GAO-CIGIE-RATB Forum identified opportunities and next steps




Accessing and using data

- Need for more awareness of data sources
- Lack of incentives to design systems useful for oversight due to differing missions
- Difficulties in measuring results and prioritizing resources

Sharing data

- Varying standards make interpreting and using others' data difficult
- Intergovernmental challenges—such as costly access to certain federal data and perceptions that sharing is a "one-way street"

# Data Analytics at GAO: Government Data Sharing Community of Practice

GAO's Government Data Sharing CoP has hosted a number of events for the audit community:

- **Legal Issues to Data Sharing:** Working with other state auditors to identify challenges and opportunities to overcome barriers to data sharing.
- **Technological Challenges to Sharing Data**: GAO's moderated a panel of experts to discuss common technological barriers to data sharing.
- **Data Sharing Conference:** GAO partnered with MITRE to host an event addressing a wide range of data-sharing issues, including maintaining audit independence, leveraging data analytic resources and techniques to identify fraud.
- **Data Sharing in Disaster Response and Recovery (January 2015):** GAO and MITRE will co-host an event on data sharing in disaster response and recovery.

## GAO on the Web

Web site: http://www.gao.gov/

## Congressional Relations

Katherine Siggerud, Managing Director, siggerudk@gao.gov
(202) 512-4400, U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW, Room 7125, Washington, DC 20548

## Public Affairs

Chuck Young, Managing Director, youngc1@gao.gov
(202) 512-4800, U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW, Room 7149, Washington, DC 20548



## Copyright

This is a work of the U.S. government and is not subject to copyright protection in the United States. The published product may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without further permission from GAO. However, because this work may contain copyrighted images or other material, permission from the copyright holder may be necessary if you wish to reproduce this material separately.